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Montessori Quotes

How is Montessori relevant today? Montessori professionals choose a quote from Dr Montessori's writings and place it in today's context.

Times have changed, and science has made great progress, and so has our work...

“Times have changed, and science has made great progress, and so has our work; but our principles have only been confirmed, and along with them our conviction that mankind can hope for a solution to its problems, among which the most urgent are those of peace and unity, only by turning its attention and

energies to the discovery of the child and to the development of the great potentialities of the human personality in the course of its formation."

Montessori, M. (1948). The Discovery of the Child, NY: Ballantine Books.

This quote is very inspiring to me. I have a need for purposeful activity and to feel there is value in what I do and what I am passionate about. What an honour it is, contributing to the progress of society and mankind. In our work we are allowing the child's spirit, full of virtue, waiting to be awakened, to be nurtured and emerge strong, thereby raising humanity to its greatest potentialities.

When I witness the many acts of kindness each day, how quickly forgiveness is granted once someone says "Sorry," or how the children deal with differences with loving curiosity, how children are willing to give up being right for the sake of unity – these behaviours are truly inspiring.

If only all of our nation's leaders could think and act like Montessori children. What a wonderful opportunity we have for influencing the world in which we live. I think Maria Montessori would be immensely proud of New Zealanders for acknowledging the importance of the Virtues Curriculum and Te Reo, incorporating them into the curriculum; creating a united classroom of love, cultural understanding, respect and peace.

I am hopeful that the children will graduate from Montessori and become leaders in society, inspiring peace and unity among their fellow world citizens, achieving the great potentialities with which they are endowed.

Nikole V. Campbell, New Plymouth Montessori, Taranaki, New Zealand

As soon as concentration has begun, act as if the child does not exist...

“As soon as concentration has begun, act as if the child does not exist.”

Maria Montessori, M. (1949). The Absorbent Mind, Chennai: Kalakshetra Publications, p.291.

I found this quote recently whilst preparing for a parent education evening titled 'Towards Independence'. Not only did it raise much excitement within the teaching team as we all discussed it, it was an absolute liberator to some of the parents in attendance, (consequently liberating for some of the children too). Response from our parent community went along these lines: 'Does that mean I can leave them in another room if they are busy?', 'Knowing that makes me feel less guilty about leaving my child alone to play.' Obviously age and stage are important, but allowing children space, free from interruption and praise, develops concentration. Children will always let us know if they do need assistance.

Maree Orland, Casa dei Bambini Foundation School, Christchurch, New Zealand

Preventing conflicts is the work of politics: establishing peace is the work of education ...

“Preventing conflicts is the work of politics: establishing peace is the work of education.”

Montessori, M. (1992). Education and Peace. Oxford: Clio Press. p. 24.

Don't we all at times long for some peace and quiet? However, in order to create a peaceful environment we need to have peaceful individuals. As teachers, we endeavour to serve as role models – no matter what sort of a day we're having, we need to practice the values and virtues, actions and words we want to see in our children. We try always to be 'in the moment' for them.

We encourage our children to know and love the feeling of inner peacefulness, being aware of the stillness they can create for themselves. Variations of silent games, relaxation, visualization, yoga, and appropriate music can help develop this awareness and love. The children help prepare and maintain the Peace Table. This is a place for quiet contemplation. In using this place to help resolve conflict, it helps our children realise that they can bring about peaceful resolution with honesty and words.

Through the Great Lessons and the Fundamental Needs of People, we learn about the interdependence and inter-connectedness of all things and that each of us has a part to play in creating a peaceful, harmonious world. We help our children to understand that absolutely everything has a particular 'cosmic task' and that together we form one whole community. Finding out the cosmic tasks of all the things we research brings about lots of interesting discussion.

We all contribute to the harmonious well-being of our classroom, the school community and the environment inside and out. We hold regular meetings and matters which are bothering people and can be discussed as a group. Our older

students have begun to do 'community service' this year, realising that they can contribute in a meaningful way to the wider community.

Dr Maria Montessori said, "If help and salvation are to come, they can only come from the children, for the children are the makers of man." Establishing peace as an important work of education is something we all strive towards.

Linda Downey, Cambridge Montessori Primary at Te Miro School, Te Miro, New Zealand

Young people must have enough freedom to allow them to act on individual initiative...

"Young people must have enough freedom to allow them to act on individual initiative. But in order that individual action should be free and useful at the same time it must be restricted with certain limits and rules that give the necessary guidance."

Montessori, M. (1994). From Childhood To Adolescence, Oxford: Clio Press, p.73

Freedom is often a word that floats out there to describe or to label 'Montessori'. Even within Montessori circles, one might often hear of a child being free to choose and that they can and are able to choose whatever they like. This quote puts freedom in perspective. Within Montessori environments there is certainly

freedom. Students are free to choose work and to move around the environment.

Our role as teachers is to encourage the responsibility of 'wise choices' that bring about an understanding of the child's role within the environment. If one observes deeper, the freedom observed is one of purpose and reason. Students start to recognize their role as participants in society and what works well for everyone. The 'structures or boundaries' within a classroom are for the common good of the group. Freedom is the ability to choose what is best not just for themselves as individuals but also for the group and as children move through the years of Montessori schooling, it often becomes more evident that students are choosing more for the group than for personal gain.

What is so wonderful about the Montessori environment is that often it is not the teacher who 'enforces' the 'restrictions'. Older students will take a younger student aside and explain that their actions are not appropriate (or vice versa). I have particularly seen this when new students start in the class. Sometimes they enter the class very comfortable with what is around them and also knowing the majority of class members. In their overexcited state of coping with this new environment they may act in a way that doesn't fit their new environment. Rather than the teacher having to single them out and explain what happens here you will hear little murmurings around the class and an older child will come and demonstrate what is appropriate and give an explanation why! This is wonderful from the point of view of the teacher as it demonstrates the journey of the children in their understanding of how a community works – there is not one big boss but each member is responsible for the welfare of the group.

Rose Phillips, Eastern Suburbs Montessori Primary, Auckland, New Zealand

Education should no longer be mostly imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities...

“Education should no longer be mostly imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities.”

Montessori, M. (1946/1989). Education for a New World. Oxford: Clio Press

Maria Montessori looked at child development as a holistic process. For her education did not mean the traditional 'transfer' of some set skills and or knowledge. Instead she encouraged teachers to look at the child's potential and interests and build upon it. So Montessori philosophy promotes a love of life-long learning, a curiosity and a deep respect for the world we live in.

This quote inspires me as an educator especially when I look at the modern research and theories in early childhood which focus on building learning dispositions. With the shift in early childhood education towards dispositional learning and developing an attitude of learning or habits of mind, educators are encouraged to develop a love of learning rather than trying to transfer knowledge alone. This is evident in Montessori classrooms and it is amazing to see how children independently develop skills and construct knowledge of the world around them.

The Montessori prepared environment and qualified Montessori teachers enable children to realise their own potential not through word of mouth but through a child's personal experience. Each child is challenged and provided with opportunities to build dispositions like resilience, reciprocity and imagination. Through experimenting with many learning materials and activities children develop working theories, problem solving skills and begin to make sense of the world around them. When I am with young children I observe how they develop independence and confidence in their abilities. I also see how this contributes to

the learning of their peers.

Through her extensive research and observations Dr Montessori devised a 'method' which is still relevant with current theory and practice. It is important for Montessori teachers to be able to identify this in all her work and apply this understanding to their practice.

Mamira Ali, Montessori at the School House, Hamilton, New Zealand

The basic error is to suppose that a person's will must necessarily be broken before it can obey ...

"The basic error is to suppose that a person's will must necessarily be broken before it can obey."

*Montessori, M. (1995). *The Absorbent Mind*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company. (p 256)*

This crucial mistake of assuming the child's will must be broken before they are able to obey teacher direction undermines the child's ability to make decisions about their own education. Dr. Montessori reminds us that only the child is the creator of the adult they are to be. If we think the child's will must be broken in order to follow directions of another are we also saying it is necessary to destroy the child's mind before we start to educate?

To "educate" the child the Montessori teacher first forms a respectful relationship that provides opportunities for the teacher to discover and uncover the child's hidden energies that lead our efforts to educate. When you have

established a respectful relationship with a child you make such an impression the child comes into him/herself. They affirm themselves, self-esteem emerges and love is present; and love means we are not alone. When both teacher and child are satisfied with life there is freedom within. Then you can start to educate.

Paul Scanlan, Titoki Montessori, Auckland, New Zealand

The senses, being explorers of the world, open the way to knowledge...

“The senses, being explorers of the world, open the way to knowledge. Our apparatus for educating the senses offers the child a key to guide his explorations of the world...”

*Montessori, M. (1988). *The Absorbent Mind*. Oxford: Clio Press. p. 167*

Dr Maria Montessori's insight into recognising and responding to the education of the young child's senses is a remarkable aspect of her method, which continues to inspire me as a practitioner. Montessori identified a period during which the young child is acutely sensitive to the impressions received through their senses. The stimuli received through the experience of taste, touch, sight, smell and sound constructs and guides the child's understanding of the physical, social, material and natural worlds. In Montessori classrooms throughout the world the sensorial materials will be presented to the child in the manner prescribed by Maria Montessori. The sensorial materials isolate qualities of the

stimuli and provide a sensory impression. After the initial presentation, the connections children make as they explore the material and develop their own understanding is unique and special. As an example, I observed a young boy, not yet three years old, feeling the rough and smooth board some days after I had presented it to him. As he ran his fingertips across the surface he said, 'Me smooth, Campbell smooth, Mummy smooth, Daddy rough.' He was expressing his understanding of the connection between the stimuli from the touch board to the sensation of the skin texture of his family. In this instance the stimuli of touch offered the opportunity to refine the child's understanding of physical attributes and the further possibility of exploring the child's sense of place within the family. Opportunities and possibilities based upon the education of the senses open the way to infinite wisdom.

Janet Du Fall, Hi Jinks Montessori Centre, Rotorua, New Zealand.

No one can be free unless he is independent...

*"No one can be free unless he is independent.
Therefore, the first active manifestations of the child's
individual liberty must be so guided that through this
activity he may arrive at independence."*

Montessori, M. (2004). The Montessori Method. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield p.118

One of the outstanding features of the Montessori environment is the

importance placed on supporting the child's quest for independence. Montessori emphasised the exercises of Practical Life as the first lessons that the young child is introduced to in a Montessori 3-6 environment.

I often find myself explaining to a parent how the simple task of peeling a carrot is a critical part of their child's education. For in the process of peeling a carrot, the young child is walking the road to independence by developing concentration, coordination, self esteem, and at the same time learning to take responsibility and contribute to self and others. Many years ago I was told that it is possible to run a Montessori school with Practical Life activities alone but it would never be possible to run a Montessori School without the exercises of Practical Life. From my observations over many years, this is something I wholeheartedly believe in.

Climbing up the step ladder and washing the windows, cleaning all the tables at the end of the morning, wheeling the morning tea trolley laden with crockery out to the kitchen; it is such a pleasure to watch pure joy emerge from the children who work with these kinds of practical activities. I have an image in mind of a little child who comes rushing through the door in the morning without even stopping to remove her backpack. There is only one thought in mind: 'If I get there quickly, I will be able to peel and slice the egg!' For this is what she currently needs in order to set herself free. To support her quest, is to support that famous call of the child, 'Help me to do it by myself'.

Camilla Browne, Montessori at Otari Preschool, Wilton, Wellington, New Zealand

There is a great sense of community within the Montessori classroom...

"There is a great sense of community within the

Montessori classroom, where children of differing ages work together in an atmosphere of cooperation rather than competitiveness. There is respect for the environment and for the individuals within it, which comes through experience of freedom within the community.”

Dr Maria Montessori (as cited in Elizabeth Hainstock, 1986, p. 81 – The Essential Montessori)

I feel privileged to work in an environment that allows the younger child to experience the daily stimulation of older role models, who in turn flourish through the responsibility of leadership. This cycle is continuous as those being mentored in turn aspire to be the role model. The Montessori learning environment promotes the understanding that children not only learn 'with' each other, but 'from' each other thus minimising the need for adult guidance and intervention. From a teaching perspective it enables the teacher to observe, support, assess and evaluate the learning that occurs. This sense of community allows the children to become confident in their environment and in themselves, using the knowledge and skills they acquire to express their own ideas and creativity. It assists them to recognise their value, to respect the creative process of others and develop a willingness to share regardless of the risks.

Only yesterday a young child reinforced for me again that the children's observations of their peers are just as reliable as their teachers! After taking off and hanging up her own hat and jacket, Lilliana, 22 months, became aware of her 12-month-old peer, Abby, struggling to do the same. Lilliana quickly turned to help and ably assisted Abby to remove her hat and coat. Children develop social

awareness and competency through an understanding of the everyday patterns which exist in their lives and the lives of others. Abby will soon be able to complete the task for herself and eventually will play the role of mentor.

Anne-Marie Love, Montessori Children's House Wanaka, Wanaka, New Zealand

An interesting piece of work, freely chosen, which has the virtue of inducing concentration...

"An interesting piece of work, freely chosen, which has the virtue of inducing concentration rather than fatigue, adds to the child's energies and mental capacities, and leads him to self-mastery."

Montessori, M. (1995). The Absorbent Mind: Holt & Company p.207

The success of Montessori in leading the child to self-mastery is evident within a Montessori classroom. When children are provided with a prepared environment, given the opportunity, the freedom and the choice to work for their own creation and development, self-mastery becomes implicit in the child. Spontaneous work freely chosen by the child and carried out by the child through the journey of the Montessori work cycle (which means safe from adult intervention) befits a work of creation.

Nature has presented many gifts to a child, not least of which is energy and curiosity! Unfortunately, such energy is often squashed and seen as a source of irritation in the midst of the busy lives of adults. So too in primary schools that

are required to deliver a curriculum decided upon by those who do not necessarily understand the child's drive to do, to act independently, to work on their own interests at their own pace.

Montessori early childhood centres and schools recognise the importance of offering children both the time and opportunities to actively explore the environment and pursue activities of their own choice. As the pressure mounts towards children manipulating letters and numbers and reading at an increasingly younger age it appears this has taken precedence over the worth of affording children the chance to self-mastery across all domains.

Recently I showed the principals of two of our local primary schools around our Montessori early childhood centre. Their interest was piqued by the children who enter their state primary schools after having attended our Montessori centre. How satisfying it was to observe our class of children working together side by side, in harmony with one another on work freely chosen.

Our guests were intrigued to see our children at age two and a half display such concentration, persistence, energy and enthusiasm as they poured water from one vessel to another and used a key to open a lock. They noticed the older children being self-directed in their choices of activities, working purposefully and tirelessly without distraction or intervention from any teacher.

The opportunity to show fellow educators through our Montessori early childhood centre provided the chance to share in practice the wise quote above of Maria Montessori.

Shelagh Powell, Principal, Courtyard Montessori Preschool, Christchurch, New Zealand

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“The secret of good teaching is to regard the child’s intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim therefore is not merely to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to tough his imagination as to enthuse him to his inmost core.”

— Maria Montessori – To Educate the Human Potential

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